

'Renewal Factor' misses the mark

After co-authoring the best seller "In Search of Excellence," Robert K. Waterman Jr. and Tom Peters went their separate ways — in pursuit of the same subject.

Peters went on to write another blockbuster, "Thriving on Chaos," which I reviewed last week. Within the same year, Waterman has come forth with a vastly different treatment for coping with essentially the same problem — constant change in the business environment.

His book, "The Renewal Factor: How the Best Get and Keep The Competitive Edge," came out almost simultaneously with "Chaos," but has received far less exposure and acclaim.

And I don't think that's just because Peters' book had better press. "The Renewal Factor" simply isn't as good.

That's not to say that Waterman's book doesn't have some useful material.

His book is the product of a three-year research project that



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investigated successful companies to document their secrets. In each case, the successful company had found a way to "renew itself" to take advantage of its changing environment.

Waterman makes his points by telling stories about the companies he and his team studied. Anecdotes about Ford Motor Co.'s Taurus project illustrate the need for a team approach to business. A tale about Morgan Guaranty's training program reinforces the importance of trust between management and employees. Stories from IBM reinforce the need for commitment and integrity within organizations.

This story-telling style makes "The Renewal Factor" more lei-

surely reading than "Thriving on Chaos," but it lacks impact.

At the end of each chapter, Waterman includes steps for achieving what he's just described. The prescriptives are sensible, even useful, but they fall flat.

Some examples of these tips include:

■ At the end of the chapter on "Teamwork, Trust, Politics and Power," his 15 summary points begin with, "Pick people on the basis of both qualification for the job and fit with the culture."

■ To put to use the lessons in the chapter titled "Friendly Facts, Congenial Controls," Waterman's first step is "Figure out where you can cut costs without lowering quality."

■ In the chapter called "Attitudes and Attention," the author's steps for getting there begin with "Start with the attitudes of the people who report to you. Do they feel as if they're part of a winning team. If not, figure out why."

These are wise prescriptives,

but they don't have the same compulsion as Tom Peters' statements. Peters would have said, "You must find qualified people who fit your corporate culture or go out of business, get your costs under control without sacrificing quality or go down the tubes, and get yourself a winning team or forget it."

Published by Bantam Books and selling for \$24.95 a copy, this book costs more than "Thriving on Chaos" and gives less for the money.

The bottom line: If you are a student of management and a fan of Tom Peters, pass up "The Renewal Factor" and invest in a copy of "Thriving on Chaos." Then, if you're hungry for more, Waterman's book might make nice additional reading.

Hillel Segal's previous Computer column now has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.